CLOCKWORK

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[001] The present invention relates to a mechanical clockwork preferably, but not exclusively, to a clockwork for pocket watches and wrist watches.

[002] Numerous embodiments of clockworks are known. Mechanical clockworks have become increasingly popular in the past few years, whereby synthetic rubies are used for the clockworks in pocket watches, and wrist watches, at locations where a low friction coefficient is needed in order to prevent abrasion, i.e. especially on the bearings of the staffs and in areas of escapement, i.e. in areas of the anchor cooperating with the escape wheel and in areas of the oscillation system (balance wheel) cooperating with the anchor, in particular as bearings for the staff, as anchor plates or anchor jewels as well as impulse pins on the balance staff. This entails additional assembly steps and additional expense.

[003] Furthermore, it is necessary with mechanical clockworks that they be reconditioned at regular intervals in order to restore the accuracy, i.e. especially residue from oil and friction must be washed out and the bearings re-oiled, which also requires at least partial disassembly, of the clockwork, and subsequent re-regulation of the rate.

[004] The object of the present invention is to provide a clockwork that is characterized by high accuracy and in which the customary maintenance heretofore required is practically unnecessary, or necessary only at very large intervals.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[005] "DLC coating" as understood in the present invention refers to Diamond-Like-Carbon hard material coating, which, based on the element carbon forms a diamond-like layer with a high micro-hardness and with an extremely low friction coefficient. The thickness of this coating is, for example, between 2 and 4mμ. The hardness of such a DLC coating is on the order of 2500 HV or higher. It is manufactured by means of plasma-supported chemical gas phase precipitation, for example, at a coating temperature of approximately 150 - 220°C. During precipitation of the coating, silicon and oxygen atoms can also be added, which provides even further reduction of friction. Such a DLC coating and its manufacture is described, for example, in WO 98/59089.

[006] "Functional elements" as understood in the present invention are elements of the oscillation system (balance wheel) and the elements of the escapement, in particular, the anchor and the escape wheel. "Further functional elements", as understood in the present invention, are also the wheels of the train, the journals and bearings of the clockwork.

[007] As far as the DLC-coated functional elements, plates, or plate elements, made of brass. It is expedient to first apply a thin layer made of a harder metal, for example a chrome layer, to the respective surface in order to achieve better adhesion of the DLC layer.

[008] Functional elements, plates or plate elements, etc. made of steel, in particular stainless steel, are preferably heat-treated, e.g. by means of vacuum hardening or plasma nitriding, before application of the DLC coating.

[009] The present invention makes the use of the heretofore customary press-fit bearing of synthetic ruby unnecessary. The bearings are instead, for example, integrated directly in the plate and the plate elements (bridges) and consist of bearing bores, or preferably of inserted metal bearings, that are DLC-coated at least on their bearing surfaces.

[010] Furthermore, preferably, gear teeth, and pinions together with bearing journals, in the present invention, are DLC-coated, resulting in a significant reduction of friction in the entire train, as compared with conventional clockworks.

[011] In the clockwork, according to the present invention, the bearing journals of the balance staff, and also of the pallet staff, have a larger diameter than in known clockworks, since a DLC coating of these bearing journals and the corresponding surfaces of the bearings provides for very low friction, which enables an increase in the bearing journal diameter without diminishing the function and accuracy. The enlargement of the bearing journal diameter results in improved shock-resistance in addition to making the elements provided for shock resistance in conventional clockworks (spring-mounted bearings for the balance staff) partially, or wholly, unnecessary.

[012] A further advantage of a mechanical clockwork is that the anchor pallets, or anchor pins, etc., made of synthetic stones (rubies) are not necessary. This makes the processing steps required for the manufacture of these pallets, stones, etc., and their assembly, unnecessary.

[013] The essential advantages of the present invention can therefore be summarized as follows:

- Synthetic press-fit bearings, pallets, anchor jewels, impulse pins etc. made of ruby are no longer necessary.
- The clockwork requires no lubrication, so that there is no danger of hardening of oils and the resulting loss of precision.
- Reduced friction in the entire system achieves absolutely stable accuracy over an extended period.
- Maintenance of the clockwork is practically no longer required, or only after a number of years, for example, after five years.
- The high surface hardness prevents mechanical wear due to friction. This increases the long-term precision, as well as the length of the maintenance-free period.

- Simplification of the structural design of the clockwork results in a significant reduction in manufacturing costs.
- The DLC coating provides protection against corrosion and therefore prevents loss of precision as well as detriments to the overall condition of the clockwork even if penetrated by moisture.

[014] In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the cooperating surfaces, for example, the bearing surfaces and/or the cooperating surfaces in the area of the escapement, for example in the area of the anchor pallet, are designed in such a way that all of these surfaces possess the DLC coating and the other element of the cooperating surfaces is made of silicon carbide (SiC). In this way, for example, the bearings of the staffs of the clockwork consist of jewels of silicon carbide, while the surfaces of the staffs cooperating with these jewels possess the DLC coating. In a similar manner, the anchor pallets, for example, are made of silicon carbide, while the surfaces of the anchor or escape wheel 1 cooperating with these pallets are DLC coated. It has been proven that the combination of DLC coating and silicon carbide results in extremely low friction coefficients on the order of 0.05 - 0.02, very surprisingly, however, since, for example, the combination of silicon carbide and silicon carbide results in a significantly higher friction coefficient, so that silicon carbide is generally to be regarded as unsuitable as a jewel in mechanical clockworks.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[015] Further advantages and special features of the present invention will become obvious in the following description of a possible embodiment of the clockwork according to the present invention. The invention is described in more detail below in conjunction with the drawing of a representative embodiment:

[016] **FIGURE 1** shows a simplified view of the anchor escapement of a mechanical pocket watch or wrist watch according to the present invention;

[017] **FIGURE 2** shows a simplified schematic partial view in cross-section of the movement plate and a bridge located on this plate, in particular in the area of the balance wheel; and

[018] **FIGURES 3 and 4** show an enlarged partial view, as a further possible embodiment of the present invention, of the bearings of the balance staff or balance journal.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[019] Figure 1 shows as a possible embodiment, the anchor escapement of a mechanical clockwork for a pocket watch or wrist watch. This escapement contains the anchor, or escape wheel **1**, linked to the remaining clockwork or train. The escape wheel can move by means of its bearing journal **2**, in the plate of the clockwork not depicted in Figure 1, and linked to the remaining, likewise not depicted, functional elements of the clockwork, and of the anchor **3**, which also pivots on its bearing journal **4**, that can move in the plate, in particular at an oscillation frequency determined by the balance wheel **5**. The yoke end **3"** located on the anchor arm **3'** of the anchor **3** cooperates with an impulse pin **8** located on a discharging roller **6** of the balance staff **7**.

[020] Furthermore, the anchor **3** possesses two pallets cooperating with the anchor wheel **1** or with the anchor wheel teeth **11** there, namely the entry pallet **9** and the exit pallet

10. The special feature of this anchor escapement includes, among other things, the fact that the anchor **3** is manufactured as one piece of metal, preferably hardened stainless steel, together with the corresponding pallets **9** and **10**, and is DLC coated at least on the surfaces of the pallets **9** and **10** cooperating with the teeth **11**, and that the escape wheel **1** is DLC coated at least on the teeth **11** cooperating with the pallets **9** and **10**. Furthermore, the anchor **3** is DLC coated at least on its yoke end **3"** cooperating with the impulse pin **8** or discharging roller **6**. The impulse pin made of metal, for example of steel, also possesses a DLC coating.

[021] In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, at least the bearing journals **3** and **4** and the balance staff **7** are DLC coated, whereby the corresponding bearings in the plate manufactured from steel, for example, or another suitable metal are formed by simple bore holes in the simplest design and then at least the areas of these bores holes forming the bearing surfaces being DLC coated.

[022] This coating results in an extremely high surface hardness of approximately 2500 HV, so that even without lubrication there is no perceptible wear. In particular, with respect to the anchor escapement, the customary synthetic rubies heretofore used for the pallets **9** and **10** and for the impulse pin **8** there and requiring an additional assembly step with additional expense, are no longer necessary. Instead, the anchor **3** can be manufactured of metal, or steel, as one piece with the pallets **7**. Furthermore, it is possible to manufacture the impulse pin **8** of metal in an especially easy manner.

[023] Figure 2 shows a simplified view of the balance wheel **5**, with the balance staff **7**, which can move by means of bearings on the movement plate **12**, and a further plate **13** (bridge). As Figure 2 shows, the movement plate **12**, the bridge **13** and also the balance staff **7**, are provided with the DLC coating **14** over the entire surface, also extending into the bearing bore holes **15** and **16**, which are provided in the plate **12** and bridge **13** for the balance staff **7**. Since both the staff **7**, and the bearing surfaces, formed by the bore holes **15** and **16**, are DLC coated,

this results in an extremely low friction coefficient, so that the balance journal or balance staff **7** can be larger than in known embodiments. The balance staff can have a diameter of 0.2 mm, instead of the heretofore customary 0.1 mm. In any event, this results in improved shock resistance, so that the heretofore customary shock resistance protection may be made wholly unnecessary by the spring-mounted bearings of the balance staff **7**. Preferably all other staffs and journals and the corresponding bearings of the clockwork are also DLC coated, making the customary jewels or rubies unnecessary, thus enabling a simplified manufacturing process while simultaneously decreasing the friction in the entire system. This significantly improves the accuracy, without lubrication or subsequent lubrication of the bearings.

[024] Preferably, all of the gear teeth are provided with the DLC coating, at least on their teeth, or tooth flanks, which helps to decrease friction, increase the accuracy over an extended period, and prevent wear.

[025] The DLC coating also has the advantage that it provides very effective protection against corrosion, so that even corrosion on the plate, on staffs, on gear teeth and on other functional elements of the clockwork are effectively prevented.

[026] In Figure 2, there are depicted, two springs **17**, that serve as protection against shock. These springs **17** also are provided with the DLC coating at least on their side facing the staff **7**.

[027] As far as brass is used as the base material for the elements, described above, for example, for the plate **12** and/or the bridge **13**, or for gear teeth, these elements are to be provided with a coating made of a harder metal, for example, chrome, before the DLC coating is applied. If functional elements are made of steel, for example, stainless steel, then they are preferably heat treated, for example, by means of vacuum hardening, and/or plasma nitriding, before application of the DLC coating.

[028] It has been assumed above that the bore holes **15** and **16** are located directly in the plate **12**, or bridge **13**. In practice, however, it will be expedient to provide for these bearing bore holes in bearing bushings **15'** and **16'**, which are manufactured from stainless steel or hardenable steel, preferably from steel suitable for plasma nitriding (e.g. stainless steel 4301 in accordance with DIN 1.4301) by means of metal cutting and provided with the DLC coating **14** after hardening, especially on the bearing surfaces, and pressed into the bridge **13**, and into the plate **12**. The bearing bushings **15'** and **16'** can also be made of hard metal.

[029] The present invention was described above based on a representative embodiment. It will be understood that numerous modifications and alterations are possible, without abandoning the underlying inventive concept on which the present invention is based. For example, it is also possible to at least partially retain the customary bearings made of synthetic rubies especially in mechanical clocks and to provide the surfaces cooperating with these bearings, i.e. the surfaces of the bearing journals, with the DLC coating.

[030] Furthermore, it is also possible in particular to use jewels of silicon carbide for the staffs **2** and **7**, while the staffs themselves possess the DLC coating at least on their surfaces cooperating with the jewels. It has been proven that the DLC coating, in combination with silicon carbide, leads to extremely low friction coefficients, especially in dry air, such as can be assumed in a closed clockwork, for example a friction coefficient on the order of only 0.02, in particular with a high resistance to wear for both the jewels and the staffs on their surfaces cooperating with the jewels.

[031] Furthermore, it is possible to manufacture the entry and exit pallets **9** and **10** also of silicon carbide, whereby the anchor or escape wheel possesses the DLC coating at least on the anchor wheel teeth cooperating with these pallets.

[032] Figure 3 shows a partial enlarged view of the bearings of the balance staff **7** or the upper end **7'** of this staff with a reduced diameter. The lower end of the staff **7** can also move by means of bearings in the same manner as shown in this drawing, in the movement plate, not shown in this drawing.

[033] The staff **7** is made of hardened stainless steel (for example, by means of plasma nitriding) and in the depicted embodiment DLC coated at least in the area of its section **7'** or provided with another coating that ensures a hard surface with a low friction coefficient for the section **7'**.

[034] The staff **7** can move with its journal end **7'** in the bridge **13**. For this purpose, there is a special bearing **19** in a recess there with a spherical form and consisting of the bearing ring **20** and the spherical bearing elements **21**, which cooperate directly with the section **7'** of the staff **7**. The bearing ring **20** is held in a suitable manner, for example, by press fitting, in the recess **18**. On the bottom side facing the middle of the staff **7** the bridge **13** forms a ring-shaped stay **22** with an opening **23**, through which the journal end **7'** is inserted and which possesses a diameter that is somewhat larger then the diameter of this journal end **7'**, but smaller than the diameter of the recess **18**.

[035] While the plate, or the bridge **13**, is manufactured from brass, for example, the bearing ring **20** is made of hardened stainless steel and is coated in a suitable manner, for example DLC coated, at least on the surfaces cooperating with the bearing elements **21**.

[036] The bearing elements **21** are made of silicon carbide, synthetic ruby, or of a ceramic material, for example Al_2O_3 ceramic. The diameter of the bearing elements is on the order of the journal end **7'**, i.e. in the depicted embodiment, the diameter of the bearing elements is approximately 0.3mm and the outer diameter of the journal end **7'** is approximately 0.5mm.

[037] On the top side of the bridge **13**, facing away from the movement plate, the bearing **19** is enclosed by the spring **17**, which, for example, is made of hardened stainless steel and is DLC coated, or is made of silicon carbide, or synthetic ruby. The journal end **7'** bears against the spring **17**.

[038] Another material, such as silicon carbide, synthetic ruby or Al_2O_3 can also be used for the material and/or coating of the spring.

[039] The bearing **19** shown in Figure 3 is characterized by a construction that can be realized easily and economically. In particular, the bearing elements **21** are made of silicon carbide, of ceramic, or of synthetic ruby, and can easily be manufactured in the required spherical form. Despite the relatively large diameter of the bearing elements **21**, in comparison with the bearing journal end **7'**, the bearing **19** can be assembled without difficulty.

[040] Figure 4 shows as a further possible embodiment, a bearing **19a**, which differs from the bearing **19**, in that the bearing ring **20** is floating, i.e. axially moveable in the direction of the ring axis in the opening **18** and is held axially in the opening **18** by two spring elements, in the depicted embodiment, including the plate springs **24** and **25**. The upper spring element **24** in Figure 4 bears against the spring **17**, or a corresponding plate, provided for on the bridge **13**, and the lower spring element **25**, bears on the top side of the stay **22**, facing the plate, or the spring **17**.

[041] The staff **7a** is designed with a journal end **7a'** corresponding to the journal end **7'**, which tapers in a truncated manner toward the free end, in particular with a taper angle of 40°. The two spring elements **24** and **25** are designed in such a way that the force of the spring element **24** is somewhat greater than the force of the spring element **25**, so that the spherical bearing elements **21** bear with a low force against the spherical sleeve surface of the journal end **7a'** of the balance staff **7a**.

[042] In the bearing **19a**, depicted in Figure 4, plate springs arranged on the same axis as the staff **7a** and are provided for as the spring elements **24** and **25**. Instead of these plate springs, other suitable spring elements can also be used, for example curved washers. The staff **7a** is made of hardened stainless steel and is DLC coated at least on the ends **7a'**.

[043] Of course, it is also possible to provide further parts or functional elements of the clockwork with the DLC coating, for example, inner surfaces of a spring barrel, in particular, at the location where the spring bears with its end on the inner surface of the spring barrel and is moved together with the rotating spring barrel during winding of the clockwork or the spring. Due to the DLC coating, the heretofore required oiling is no longer necessary.

LIST OF REFERENCE SYMBOLS

1	anchor or escape wheel
2	pallet staff
3	anchor
3'	anchor arm
3"	yoke end
4	anchor bearing journal
5	balance wheel
6	discharging roller
7	balance staff or pivot
8	impulse pin or pivot
9	entry pallet
10	exit pallet
11	anchor wheel gear
12	movement plate
13	bridge
14	DLC layer
15, 16	bearing bore hole
15', 16'	hard alloy bearing
17	spring
18	recess
19	bearing
20	bearing ring
20', 20"	bearing ring section
21	spherical bearing element
22	bore hole